

February 12, 2023

Esteemed members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Stephanie Moran and I am a resident of West Hartford, as well as a teacher in the West Hartford Public Schools. I stand strongly in support of HB 6616; in my teaching role, I have many experiences with children and their families who desperately need access to HUSKY. Without adequate healthcare coverage, students cannot focus on learning, which puts them at an even greater disadvantage than they already are as immigrants. Neglecting to provide healthcare coverage to these children also impacts the community at large, since their physical and mental health determines whether they will contribute productively to our society, or alternatively, become reliant on an already-burdened public support system, or even turn to crime.

Many times children arrive lacking many vaccinations, some even arrive with no medical documentation at all and must start the vaccination schedule anew. A physical alone is \$100, and each shot is an additional \$20. Many clinics cost even more and do not offer sliding scale payment options. Without insurance, families must wait until they find work and earn enough, or depend on social services to cover the cost. This delays a child's ability to enter school at a time when they need structure and instruction more than their peers. Access to HUSKY would mean that these children can get quick appointments and start school within days of arrival as opposed to weeks. Without doubt, vaccinations benefit the health of everyone in the community, and education allows these traumatized children to better adapt to their new environment, acquire necessary skills and language, and ultimately develop into contributing members of our society.

Once students enroll in school, regular attendance is crucial. Student illness and poor dental care create distractions and undue absences; absences rack up and students miss important instruction they need. If students do come to school while ill, they struggle to focus and cannot access the instruction. New immigrants who are often behind educationally before they even walk in the school doors cannot afford to miss school for treatable illnesses, and our communities cannot afford to lose the opportunity to educate and support these vulnerable newcomers.

My colleague recently reminded me that one of the biggest issues that immigrant teens face is depression. As she said, "these children did not choose their own adventures. Parents or other adults made the decision, and often did not tell their children until the day before they left. Their journeys were long and stressful. They tell of boats, deserts, immigration 'prison,' being hungry for days, watching their parents cry and nearly give up. These children miss friends, family, pets, and the childhoods they left behind. They are now watching their parents struggle to meet daily needs, and are often watching younger siblings while their parents work multiple jobs."

Public school systems cannot provide sufficient mental health services for students with this level of stress and trauma, and families are not able to afford private care. It is incumbent upon the State of Connecticut to not only act morally and ethically to protect these vulnerable students, but also to take the necessary steps to ensure that these immigrant families have optimum success to integrate into our communities as independent and productive citizens.

Please do what is necessary to protect all children, regardless of immigration status, so that they have timely access to proper dental, medical and mental health services. Children should not have to suffer in CT. I urge this committee to support HB 6616 and pass this legislation.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie M. Moran